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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fifth session
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by UNANIMA International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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Statement*

1. World Bank President Robert Zoellick strongly affirms investing in girls' education and stated that investing in adolescent girls was precisely the catalyst poor countries needed to break intergenerational poverty and to create a better distribution of income; investing in them was not only fair, it was a smart economic move.

2. The Beijing Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Commission for Social Development have also reaffirmed this. The Commission on the Status of Women has further encouraged and supported girls' education, not only in general, but specifically for training in science and technology. The agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women for 2006 and 2007 emphasized the right of girls to education and highlighted the need to increase their equal and effective access to and use of information and communication technologies, as well as applied technology and urged Governments to enact legislation to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and to monitor compliance.

3. We urge the delegates of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women:

(a) To reaffirm girls' right to education;

(b) To urge the implementation of their full access to education, training, science and technology;

(c) To take further steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against them.

Chronic poverty, decent work and girls education

4. A recent report prepared by the Research Centre for the Study of Chronic Poverty at the University of Manchester discusses poverty traps which lead to chronic poverty as experienced across generations. In addition to naming persistent discriminatory family codes as one of the unjust institutions which form barriers for girls in their efforts to achieve their full potential and to secure a form of decent work, the authors point to education as a way out of the poverty trap. However, not just any education will do. It must be a quality education that prepares them in the same way that boys and men are prepared — for decent work and effective political participation in their societies.

5. That such is not the case in many parts of the world is verified in the shadow reports prepared by NGOs for signatories to the CEDAW convention and in the testimony of girl participants at the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women where girls themselves pointed out discriminatory practices that occur within their schools.

6. A young woman speaking at a side event during Commission on the Status of Women 51 said that a friend of hers had been working very hard to do well in school and had told her that the teacher of their main subject had asked her to have sex with him but she had refused. It had been at the time of their exams, there had been more than 70 students and he had put her in last place.

* Issued without formal editing.

7. In a shadow report given to the CEDAW committee in 2009, a researcher reporting on the results of her investigation into discrimination against girls within the school system said that girls had been counselled to go into classes like sewing and hairdressing while the boys had been encouraged to take science, maths and engineering.

8. Unfortunately these are not isolated experiences but are repeated often and in many places in the world, with the result that educational discrimination against girls which they experience in their education becomes an obstacle to their future advancement rather than the release from poverty that education should afford them.

9. The benefits of working in scientific and technological fields have been well established. Women, however, remain underrepresented in these professions and girls are notably absent from the fields of study that lead to employment in these fields and therefore have little access to the wages and decent work which lift them out of situations of poverty and dependence. Instead, throughout the world but particularly in regions where the incidences of poverty are higher and more severe, discriminatory family codes, son bias, physical insecurity, restricted civil liberties, and limited resource rights and entitlements characterize the situation of young women living in situations of poverty.

Results of structural discrimination against girls

10. The discrimination that occurs in the educational setting is found in other areas of the lives of girls living in poverty with the result that cultural preference for sons has resulted in over 100 million missing girls due to female foeticide, infanticide, malnutrition and neglect. Girls are forced into early marriage, increasing their risk of domestic violence and complications in pregnancy which can even lead to death. In addition girls living in situations of poverty, with little or no education, are especially vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation. Without a good education they have few options open to them for survival. Of the 1.2 million women estimated to be trafficked for sexual exploitation annually, about half of them are children. Some of these girls have been sold by their parents to pay a debt or a bride price for a son. Some have been kidnapped or lured with the promise of a paying job in another city or country.

11. We decry this vulnerability of young women and urge Member States to develop policies and practices in their educational systems which allow for the full development of the potential of approximately half of their populations.

12. We recommend that Member States:

(a) Within a framework of a comprehensive national education strategy, undertake systematic reform of education at all levels designed to promote rights-based gender equality and the right of all girls to quality education. Ensure their safety in travel to and from school as well as in the school and classroom themselves;

(b) Enhance the scientific literacy of girls by removing all barriers to science and technology education in order to empower girls to develop their full potential in whatever field they choose. Provide girls with fellowships, grants and programmes to address current disparities especially in the fields of science and technology;

(c) Create educational environments that support girls' education and training, especially in non-traditional fields such as science and technology. Increasing the number of women teachers and professors, particularly in the areas of science and technology may provide much needed role models for girls contemplating careers in these fields;

(d) Develop and implement a national effort to eliminate discrimination in the public and private spheres based on the notion of girls' inferiority and support positive attitudes and behaviours that encourage girls' full partnership in all areas of life. Such an effort must also utilize the media and change the current socialization of men and boys which has somehow indicated to them that it is acceptable for them to act as demanders for the exploitation of women and girls through prostitution and pornography which fuel human trafficking.

Note: Statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Congregations of Saint Joseph, Grail, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salesian Mission, Sisters of Charity Federation, Temple of Understanding, and VIVAT International.